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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: FM ZEBARI ON REGIONAL ISSUES; AMBASSADORIAL
APPOINTMENTS; SF/SOFA

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Classified By: Political Counselor Matt Tueller for Reasons 1.4d/b

11. (C) SUMMARY. In a May 21 meeting with PolCouns and Senior Advisor for Northern Iraq, Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari was skeptical about the prospects for a June Arab League ministerial in Baghdad, but more upbeat about an Expanded Neighbors FM-level meeting here. Zebari described bilateral relations with Jordan as "very bad" but mentioned that the Iraqi and Jordanian delegations at Sharm discussed the possibility of King Abdullah visiting Baghdad. Zebari gave mixed reviews to the more pro-active diplomacy Turkey is currently pursuing with Iraq: he is unsure about the extent of the Turkish General Staff's buy-in to Special Envoy Murat Ozcelik's mission and thought the Turkish team strayed into issues that were "none of their business" during their last trip to Iraq. Zebari said POTUS focused on SFA/SOFA talks and the Iranian threat during their Sharm ash-Sheikh meeting. Developing the Strategic Framework/Status of Forces Agreement (SF/SOFA) theme, Zebari said he was open to ideas about a back-up plan should SF/SOFA negotiations not be concluded on time and floated the idea of ongoing Chapter VII protection for Iraqi assets. END SUMMARY.

Neighbors/Regional Developments/Bilateral Visits

12. (C) FM Zebari was hopeful that following a next round in Washington, a year-end GCC plus 2 plus 1 ministerial could take place in Baghdad in either November or December. Turning to other planned meetings, Zebari "very much doubted" Iraq would host a June Arab League meeting but was more upbeat about the prospects for the next Expanded Neighbors Ministerial, which he labeled a "real possibility." Giving a quick read-out of the Cairo Arab League meeting, Zebari said Foreign Minister Saud of Saudi Arabia urged him to visit the KSA, and mentioned that Foreign Ministers Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayid and Khalid al Khalifa of the UAE and Bahrain were still weighing Baghdad visits. Zebari added that French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner had decided to wait until after the Stockholm ICI conference and visit Iraq on June 3rd.

13. (C) PolCouns explained that we understood Jordan's King Abdullah wanted better relations with Iraq and was intent on exploring new ways to solidify bi-lateral ties. Downcast, Zebari explained that relations, already strained by Jordanian perception that Iraq is dragging its feet on trade and refugee issues, were being poisoned by the "Yacht Affair" (reftel) which King Abdullah viewed as a personal insult. Zebari assured us both the Presidency Council and the PM were aware of the problem, but no one has yet proposed a solution. On a more positive note, Zebari mentioned that during the Sharm ash-Sheikh Economic Forum, Vice President Adel Abdel Mehdi and Jordanian Prime Minister Dahabi discussed an Abdullah visit to Baghdad. Zebari immediately modulated, however, and admitted he had heard the idea before and doubted much would come of it this time. Zebari thought the USG has a role to play to assuage Jordanian feelings that

they are neglected players in the region. On Lebanon, a clearly delighted and amused Zebari termed the newly-minted Doha agreements an "historic turning-point" in the region's history that cemented the leadership role of smaller, up-and-coming players like Qatar at the expense of traditional powers like Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The entire episode nevertheless marked a Hizballah victory that, in a clear reference to Iraq, Zebari suggested could provide a blue-print for other organizations.

Northern Iraq/Turkish Issues

14. (C) Donning his KDP cap and alluding to a Turkish proposal on provincial council seat apportionment in Kirkuk, Zebari groused that Special Envoy Murat Ozcelik's team had crossed into topics that "were none of their business" during their most recent visit to Baghdad. The issue, he continued, was UNAMI's to work; the Turks would have to be more discreet guests. Cross Border Operations (CBO) also remained a problem. There were limits, Zebari complained, adding that he cautioned the Turks about land CBOs in particular. Becoming more conciliatory, he conveyed that KRG President Massud Barzani (his nephew) was willing to meet Ozcelik's delegation in Baghdad. Noting that Ozcelik did not come across as particularly well-informed about Turkish military operations, Zebari wondered how much Turkish General Staff support - a key to real progress - Ozcelik's mission enjoys. (Note. In a late-April meeting in Turkey, Turkish DCHOD General Saygun told Ambassador Crocker that he was aware of Ozcelik's KRG meetings and outreach and implied that he concurred with the initiative. Zebari's feelings about TGS primacy over the Turkish MFA, however, remain widely-held

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among senior Kurdish decision-makers. End Note.)

15. (C) Senior Advisor Krajewski stressed that as the Article 140 process unfolds, the USG would be particularly concerned about the security of minority groups, including Iraqi Christians. Zebari pointed to recent GOI operations in Mosul as evidence of increasing inter-community cooperation and agreed that minority treatment amounted to a foreign policy issue. UNAMI's incremental Article 140 approach was good, he went on, because it produced tangible - if minor - deliverables that would forestall tensions as June 30 passes. Zebari assessed that Prime Minister Maliki supported UNAMI's Article 140 work although he was quick to add that it was never easy for him to get a firm read on the PM's thinking. The Special Advisor warned about "uncontrolled reactions" from the different groups affected by the Article 140 process, and worried that the Prime Minister's other concerns might keep him from focusing on some of these issues.

SF/SOFA

16. (C) In the Sharm meeting with VP Abdulmehdi, DPM Salih, and the FM, Zebari said POTUS stressed the urgency of the SF/SOFA talks with his Iraqi interlocutors. Zebari welcomed the message, but immediately side-stepped, noting there remained "real problems" that could derail the process. A visibly troubled Zebari mentioned the June MNF assessment, and worried that the GOI was now not sure it wanted to completely end Chapter VII status. As the discussion unfolded, asset protection emerged as his primary concern. Deadpan, Zebari asked what the alternatives were if the parties failed to reach an agreement and wondered if it would be possible to prolong Chapter VII protection for Iraqi assets while pursuing the SF/SOFA framework for security and other issues. PolCouns said we were prepared to discuss bilateral approaches to protecting assets, but that at this point the urgency of successfully completing SF/SOFA negotiations should be paramount.

AMBASSADORS

17. (C) Zebari proudly related that after months of

sectarian and partisan wrangling, the Cabinet had approved a slate of forty (out of an original sixty) ambassadorial candidates. Only candidates from Ittilaf, Tawafuq, and the Kurdish Alliance along with some token independents had passed the Cabinet. Zebari, who described the process as more difficult than forming a government, said that to prevent more political bickering, the next trick would be to get the Iraqi Council of Representatives to vote on the slate as a package. He hoped CoR and Presidency Council approval could take place before August recess. Zebari added that the list of six career diplomats with ambassadorial rank (who only require PM approval to be appointed) he hand picked to serve in key Arab countries including Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Kuwait was on the PM's desk. PolCouns offered to have the Embassy weigh in with the PM to move the matter forward, but Zebari suggested deferring a direct approach for the time being.

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